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# MASTERMINDS OF TERROR

**THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MOST DEVASTATING  
TERRORIST ATTACK THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN**

**Yosri Fouda and Nick Fielding**

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## CHAPTER SIX

### *Unlocking the Masterminds*

'End of the matter: consult with no one when it comes to the killing of Americans.'

Osama bin Laden

Deep asleep on the floor of room five, Fouda felt a gentle, repetitive nudge on his shoulder. 'Brother Yosri, brother Yosri,' a calm, persistent voice whispered, 'it is dawn.'

Day two in that Karachi safe house got off to an expected start: prayers again led by Ramzi Binalshibh. Still drying his wet arms with the tail of his kameez, Khalid rushed in and took his place next to Fouda. With him there was a new face.

'Stand straight – shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot,' Ramzi kindly commanded, 'may Allah have mercy on you.' During the prayers, Ramzi recited parts of Surah 9 from the Koran, known as *At-Taubah* (Repentance).

Revealed in the ninth year of the *Hijrah*,<sup>1</sup> it is the only surah that does not start with the formula *Besmellahi rahmaani raheem* – In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful – for it is a declaration of war. When it was written in the seventh century, the Christian Byzantine Empire based in Constantinople had begun to move against the expanding Muslim tribes streaming out of Arabia, and this surah contains mention of a greater war to come and instructions with regard to it. It refers to the ghazwah of Tabuk, and especially to those Arab tribes who failed to join the Muslims in that raid:

O ye who believe! What aileth you that when it is said unto you: Go forth in the way of Allah, ye are bowed down to the ground with heaviness? Take ye pleasure in the life of the world rather than in the



Hereafter? The comfort of life of the world is but little in the Hereafter. If ye go not forth He will afflict you with a painful doom, and will choose instead of you a folk other than you. Ye cannot harm Him at all. Allah is Able to do all things.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Hypocrites', as the half-hearted supporters of Islam were called, had long been a thorn in the side of the Muslims. It is a moving and commanding section of the Koran and Ramzi was entranced by it. In a fearful, shaken but beautiful voice, Ramzi wept as he went on reciting more of the same surah:

Lo! Allah hath bought from the believers their lives and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs: they shall fight in the way of Allah and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Koran. Who fulfilleth His covenants better than Allah? Rejoice then in your bargain that ye have made, for that is the supreme triumph.<sup>3</sup>

It is this very surah, it has since become known, that the hijackers were instructed to recite as they carried out the hijackings on 11 September, along with Surah 8, *Al-Anfal*, known as 'The Spoils'. From the content of the latter, its date of revelation can be established as the time that elapsed between the ghazwah of Badr,<sup>4</sup> the first in the history of Islam, and the division of the spoils, both of which occurred in the second year of the Hijrah.

According to the Koran, a Meccan caravan was returning from Syria. Its leader, Abu Sufyan, feared he would be attacked by the forces of the Prophet in Medina, and sent a camel-rider on to Mecca with a frantic appeal for help. In response, the tribe of the Qureysh<sup>5</sup> mounted an expedition and headed north towards Medina.

Mohammed's little army of 313 men, ill-armed and roughly equipped, travelled across the desert for three days until they halted near the waters of Badr. It was here that they heard news that the army of the Qureysh from Mecca was approaching on the other side of the valley.

When thy Lord inspired the angels (saying): I am with you. So make those who believe stand firm. I will throw fear into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Then smite the necks and smite of them each finger. That is because they opposed Allah and His messenger. Whoso opposeth Allah and His messenger (for him) lo! Allah is severe in punishment. That (is the award), so taste it, and (know) that for disbelievers is the torment of the Fire. O ye who believe! When ye meet those who disbelieve in battle, turn not your backs to them. Whoso on that day turneth his back to them, unless manoeuvring for battle or intent to join a company, he truly hath

incurred wrath from Allah, and his habitation will be hell, a hapless journey's end.<sup>6</sup>

The army of Qureysh outnumbered the Muslims by more than two to one. When the Prophet saw them streaming down the sand dunes, he cried: 'O Allah! Here are the Qureysh with all their chivalry and pomp, who oppose Thee and deny Thy messenger. O Allah! Thy help which Thou hast promised me! O Allah! Make them bow this day!'

O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred (steadfast) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence. Now hath Allah lightened your burden, for He knoweth that there is weakness in you. So if there be of you a steadfast hundred they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a thousand (steadfast) they shall overcome two thousand by permission of Allah. Allah is with the steadfast. It is not for any Prophet to have captives until he hath made slaughter in the land. Ye desire the lure of this world and Allah desireth (for you) the Hereafter, and Allah is Mighty, Wise.<sup>7</sup>

The implication of this surah is clear. It relates to other battles in other times, but this is the period in the history of Islam that provides inspiration to al-Qaeda and their followers. They too see themselves as a small, isolated band fighting against impossible odds. They look back in history and see how during the earliest days of Islam a small group of Muslims were able with their new faith to turn the injustice and oppression exercised against them by ignorant Qureysh into an overwhelming spiritual power that enabled them in the end to create and defend their own state.

Irresistibly, this period in the history of Islam has a unique flavour of magnetic nostalgia: its own aroma, rituals, myths, visions, metaphysics, and even its own vocabulary. People are rigidly divided, according to this way of thinking, into believers and disbelievers or hypocrites. No one can have a personal philosophy, for there is no such thing as philosophy.

According to the distinctions adopted by bin Laden and his followers, Muslims are divided into one of two categories: *Muhajiroun*<sup>8</sup> or *Ansar*.<sup>9</sup> The *Muhajiroun* are those who are urged to flee injustice and infidelity until such a time that they can come back and deal with it, while the *Ansar* are urged to receive them and support them until such a time that they can all unite in a common fight. This, for example, is how the London-based al-Muhajiroun group chose its name. Its leader, Syrian-born Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, who 'fled' via Saudi Arabia to London on a fake Lebanese



passport, deeply believes in this. Avoided by mainstream Muslims, he divides the world into either *Dar Harb* (house of war) or *Dar Silm* (house of peace). Ironically, London, where he lives on social support, is *Dar Harb*.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the mujahideen in the hills and mountains of Afghanistan would certainly like to think of themselves in these terms. Members of bin Laden's al-Qaeda and Ayman al-Zawahiri's Islamic Jihad who moved to Afghanistan from other countries are thus defined as Muhajiroun; while members of Mullah Omar's Taliban and other indigenous groups in Afghanistan are Ansar. Interestingly, when bin Laden rented a house in Sayed Jalaluddin Afghani Road in Peshawar, Pakistan, he called it *Beit al-Ansar* (Place of the supporters of the Prophet). Likewise, when Mohammed Atta, Ramzi Binalshibh and the rest of the Hamburg cell moved in 1998 to their flat in 54 Marienstrasse, they called it *Dar al-Ansar* (House of the supporters of the Prophet).

With this background, it comes as no surprise to find that the innermost circle of bin Laden and al-Qaeda refer to the 11 September attacks as the 'Manhattan ghazwah',<sup>11</sup> for they truly believe they are in a phase of jihad to establish the Islamic state, similar to that one of the early age of Islam. The ten-year period between 622, the year of the Prophet's flight from Mecca, and 632, the year of his death, becomes the mythical environment in which the masterminds and the hijackers view themselves.

Over the centuries the frequency of raids in the name of Islam rose and fell. They came to an end in the early twentieth century with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of a strong central authority under the House of Saud. According to two notable Islamic scholars, 'The reconstituted ghazwahs directed at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and other targets are intended to overturn that history and bring men back to the example of the Prophet.'<sup>12</sup>

A chilling five-page handwritten document was found in the luggage Mohammed Atta left behind at Boston Logan Airport as he rushed to catch his connecting flight – doomed American Airlines Flight 11. The document, released by the FBI,<sup>13</sup> gave spiritual guidance to the hijackers as they approached the climax of their mission:

As you set your foot into (T)<sup>14</sup> and just before you enter, recite your prayers and remember that it is a ghazwah in the way of Allah, for the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'A ghazwah . . . in the way of Allah is better than the World and what is in it'.

As they were just about to challenge mighty America, the document reminds the 19 hijackers of the angels that supported the Muslims in the ghazwah of Badr, when the unbelievers outnumbered the ill-equipped believers: 'Smile and feel secure, Allah is with the believers, and the angels are guarding you without you feeling them.'

Dreams and visions and their interpretation are also an integral part of these spiritual beliefs. They mean that the mujahideen are close to the Prophet, for whatever the Prophet dreams will come true. In a videotape recorded shortly after 11 September, al-Qaeda spokesman Sulaiman Abu Ghaith is seen and heard speaking in the company of bin Laden, who was playing host to a visitor from Mecca: 'I saw in my dreams that I was sitting in a room with the Sheikh [bin Laden], and all of a sudden there was breaking news on TV. It showed an Egyptian family going about its business and a rotating strap that said: "In revenge for the sons of al-Aqsa [that is, the Palestinians], Osama bin Laden executes strikes against the Americans." That was before the event.'

Bin Laden then interprets: 'The Egyptian family symbolises Mohammed Atta, may Allah have mercy on his soul. He was in charge of the group.'

Ramzi Binalshibh would later tell Fouda long stories about the many dreams and visions of the 'brothers' in the run-up to 11 September. He would speak of the Prophet and his close companions as if he had actually met them.

In a phone call shortly before the zero hour, Binalshibh asked Atta 'persistently' to pray to Allah during the attack that He may forgive him (Binalshibh) if he did wrong or was imperfect. 'Mohammed [Atta] used to assure me that we shall meet, God willing, in Paradise, and that our meeting shall be soon,' said Ramzi. 'I asked him [that] if he was to see the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, and reach the highest place in Heaven, he should convey our *salaam* [greetings] to him as well as to Abu Bakr, Omar and the rest of the companions, followers and mujahideen.'

Atta promised so to do, but also told Ramzi a little anecdote about 'brother' Marwan (al-Shehhi) that he knew would please him. 'Mohammed told me that Marwan had a beautiful dream that he was [physically] flying high in the sky surrounded by green birds not from our world, and that he was crashing into things, and that he felt so happy.'

'What things?' Fouda asked.

'Just things,' answered Ramzi.

Green birds are often given significance in these dreams.

This mentality that dwells in the early age of Islam is also evident in the way the devotees of this new, almost heretical form of Islam refer to one another. All Muslims are 'brothers', this is not uncommon. What is uncommon is that each has a kunyah<sup>15</sup> that has got nothing to do with the person's real name. It borrows straight from the past, and it is meant to do so. Every member is assigned a kunyah that is actually the name of one of the Prophet's Companions, a faithful imam, a scientist, a military leader, a hero, etc.

This serves more than one purpose. It encapsulates a mountain of history into one name, and thus it is a great motivator. It is also a 'codename', crucial



for underground activity, and this would please someone like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed. And it provides for a spiritual belonging and an emotional bond amongst the 'brothers' in a society of mujahideen in the way of Allah, and this would very much please someone like Ramzi Binalshibh.

A few weeks after the Karachi interviews, Ramzi sent Fouda a floppy disk answering some further questions. One of them was the exact kunyah for each of the 19 hijackers. Here is the way Ramzi himself put them in order, and the authors' research on each kunyah:

1. Mohammed Atta (Leader of the team that hijacked American Airlines Flight 11, which crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center): *Abu 'Abdu'l'Rahman al-Masri*. Literally, it means 'father of the servant of the Beneficent, the Egyptian'. One of the most famous Abdu'l'Rahmans in the early history of Islam is perhaps Abdu'l'Rahman Ibn 'Ouf. He is one of the ten to whom the Prophet gave glad tidings that they would go to Paradise. He donated much of his wealth to the army of the Muslims, and the Prophet once said to him: 'O! Ibn 'Ouf, you are one of the rich, and you will be entering Paradise toddling.'

2. Satam al-Suqami (AA Flight 11): *'Azmi*. The 'i' suffix in Arabic relates the meaning of the main body of the name to the caller. Thus, as you call him, you would actually be saying: 'My 'Azm'. Literally, the word 'Azm' means 'resolve' or 'determination'. There is no specific 'Azmi in history books, as this style of naming was not common in the early ages of Islam.

3. Waleed al-Shehri (AA Flight 11): *Abu Mos'ab*. Literally, it means 'father of the invincible'. One of the most famous Mos'abs in the early history of Islam is Mos'ab Ibn 'Omair. He was one of the most handsome, aristocratic, knowledgeable Companions. He also became the first ambassador in the history of Islam after the Prophet dispatched him to Medina to teach its inhabitants – the Ansar – the new religion.

4. Wail al-Shehri (AA Flight 11): *Abu Salman*. Literally, it means 'father of the intact'. It was Salman al-Farsi, originally from Persia, who suggested that the Muslims should dig a large trench around Medina to protect the believers against the armies of the disbelievers. A novelty in Arab warfare, it later proved crucial. The Prophet said of him: 'Salman is one of us, people of the House.' He was gifted with great wisdom and the Prophet's cousin, 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, bestowed on him the laqab (title) of 'Luqman the wise'.

5. Abdul Aziz al-Omari (AA Flight 11): *Abu'l'Abbas al-Janoubi*. Literally, it means 'father of the one who frowns a lot, the southern'. The third state in the history of Islam was established in Baghdad by the Abbasids. But it is probably long before this that we find an association between this kunyah and the Prophet's uncle, al-Abbas Ibn 'Abde'l'Mottaleb.

6. Marwan al-Shehhi (Leader of the team that hijacked United Airlines Flight 175, which crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade

Center): *Abu'l'Qaqa'a al-Qatari*. The word 'Qaqa'a' in Arabic means 'the sound of clashing swords'. But al-Shehhi was not from Qatar. He was actually born in the United Arab Emirates. The most famous Qaqa'a is certainly al-Qaqa'a Ibn 'Amre al-Tamimi, a legendary military leader. The first Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Seddiq, said of him: 'Lo! The voice of al-Qaqa'a in battle is better than one thousand men.'

7. Fayez Rashid Banihammad (UA Flight 175): *Abu Ahmed al-Emarati*. The second part of the kunyah means that he comes from the United Arab Emirates, but the first part is too common. It probably refers to his grandfather, Ahmed Hassan al-Qadi. Generally speaking, however, the Prophet advised that the best names are those constructed of the letters 'ABD' or 'HMD'.

8. Hamza al-Ghamdi (UA Flight 175): *Julaibeeb al-Ghamdi*. Julaibeeb is the diminutive for Jilbab, which is the one-piece, traditional Arab dress. Al-Ghamdi is, literally, the one who manufactures scabbards for swords. A great companion of the Prophet, Julaibeeb al-Ansari disappeared during the ghazwah of Uhud, the second in Islam and the most disastrous. The Prophet said: 'But I miss Julaibeeb.' They later found his body next to the bodies of seven slain unbelievers.

9. Ahmed al-Ghamdi (UA Flight 175): *Ikrimah al-Ghamdi*. Ikrimah is a very old and common name among pre-Islam Arabs. A man of influence in Qureysh, Mecca, 'Amre Ibn Hisham, who was a sworn enemy of the Muslims, was later given the kunyah of Abu Jahl (literally: father of ignorance) and the laqab of 'enemy of Allah'. He had a son called 'Ikrimah' who later embraced Islam and became a close companion. The Prophet said to him: 'Welcome, riding immigrant.'

10. Mohannad al-Shehri (UA Flight 175): *Omar al-Azdi*. Apparently named after the second Caliph, 'Omar Ibn al-Khattab. Like 'Amre Ibn Hisham, he was a sworn enemy of the Prophet in the early days of Islam until the Prophet prayed to Allah to strengthen Islam with either of them. As it turned out, it was 'Omar who embraced Islam and became the symbol of justice with his kunyah, al-Farouq.

11. Hani Hanjour (Leader of the team that hijacked American Airlines Flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon): *'Orwah al-Ta'ifi*. Named after 'Orwah Ibn Massoud al-Thaqafi who embraced Islam in the very early days and asked the Prophet that he be allowed to go back to his folk in Ta'if with the new faith. As he approached them on top of a hill they fired arrows at him until he fell to the ground. As he was dying he said: 'This is such an honour Allah has bestowed on me, and such a martyrdom Allah has given to me.'

12. Nawaf al-Hazmi (AA Flight 77): *Rabi'ah al-Makki*. Named after Rabi'ah Ibn Ka'ab, a close companion and a devoted servant of the Prophet. Impoverished and not so handsome, he was taken care of by the Prophet



himself who told him: 'Ask me anything and I will give it to you.'

13. **Salem al-Hazmi (AA Flight 77): Bilal al-Makki.** There is only one Bilal in Islam. It is Bilal Ibn Rabah al-Habashi. A black slave in pagan Qureysh, he embraced Islam and had to endure fierce torture. He was left in the boiling desert with a large stone on his chest. Every time they checked on him, they found him repeating one phrase that was to resonate throughout the history of Islam: '*Ahadun, Ahad* (the One and Only).' He was bought and freed by Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. Gifted with a beautiful voice, he was chosen by the Prophet to be Islam's first caller for the prayers.

14. **Khalid al-Mihdhar (AA Flight 77): Sinan.** Linguistically, Sinan is the spear, and sometimes specifically the front edge of it. It can also be used to mean the stone on which one sharpens a sword. There are many Sinans in the history of the Arabs, including Rashad-ul Din Sinan, the 'Old Man of the Mountains' who was leader of the sect of Assassins in the twelfth century.

15. **Majed Moqed (AA Flight 77): al-Ahnaf.** Named apparently after one of the Prophet's closest companions, al-Ahnaf Ibn Qais. He was credited for his enlightened opinions, patience and tolerance.

16. **Ziad al-Jarrah (Leader of the team that hijacked United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Pennsylvania): Abu Tareq al-Lubnani.** Literally, it means 'father of the one who knocks on the door, the Lebanese'. It is very likely that he was named after Tareq Ibn Ziad. One of the greatest military leaders in the Ummayyad age, he conquered North Africa and the Andalus (now Spain). As he crossed the Mediterranean from Africa into Europe he burnt his ships and cried at his soldiers: 'The enemy is in front of you, and the sea is behind you.' Until today, the rock where he crossed still bears his very name, Gabal Tareq, Gibraltar (Mountain of Tareq).

17. **Saeed al-Ghamdi (UA Flight 93): Mo'ataz al-Ghamdi.** The name 'Mo'ataz' is derived from the noun 'izzah' which means 'might, pride, invincibility'. This style of naming started to be common during the Abbasid age, but no one with this name is outstanding.

18. **Ahmed al-Haznawi (UA Flight 93): Ibn al-Jarrah al-Ghamdi.** Al-Jarrah in Arabic is 'the surgeon'. It is almost certain that he was named after Abu Ubaidah 'Amer al-Jarrah, a great Companion of whom the Prophet said: 'Every nation has a trustee, and the trustee of this nation is Abu Ubaidah.' He is also one of the ten to whom the Prophet gave glad tidings that they would go to Paradise.

19. **Ahmed al-Na'ami (UA Flight 93): Abu Hashem.** Ramzi Binalshibh said that al-Na'ami was a descendent of the Prophet. If true, the kunyah then makes sense. The Prophet's family was related to the Hashemite family. His grandfather, Hashem Ibn 'Abd Manaf was one of Qureysh's most distinguished, honourable and influential men. He took charge of the *Ka'aba* (the House of Allah which Muslims believe was built by the Prophet Abraham in Mecca) and played host to pilgrims.

After the prayers it was time for breakfast. Ramzi went to the kitchen, Khalid to his SMS messages. Curious about the newcomer who was following Khalid wherever he went, Fouda questioned Ramzi. 'Our brother is a close companion of Shiekh Abu Abdullah [bin Laden], God protect him,' Ramzi said as he started to boil about a dozen eggs, 'he has a nice anecdote for you.'

Reaching out for some plates, he added: 'And by the way, you better think of a name for him as he is not going to give you one.'

Fouda decided to call the man 'Abu Anas'. Ramzi liked it. 'Does this remind you of Hamburg?' Fouda asked.

'What? The kitchen?' Ramzi smiled as he went on. 'Hamburg! The good old days – of course it is always on my mind. All the brothers with whom I shared every moment, especially those who paid with their lives in the way of Allah. May Allah count them all amongst the martyrs.' Against Ramzi's wish, Fouda insisted that he was going to make tea this time. It was the friendliest moment so far.

'But, brother Ramzi, they also killed innocent civilians.' Fouda threw in the remark as diplomatically as he could. Ramzi was not impressed, although it was obvious that he had been bracing himself for such a question.

'This is a big issue,' he said firmly, 'and I do not wish you to confuse it in your programme, like many have done.' Trying to sidestep the question, he then asked: 'Did you see that programme on the BBC which was filmed in Hamburg and America?'<sup>16</sup> Fouda nodded as he continued to listen. 'It was good – very good, was it not?' Ramzi said, 'but only from a Western point of view.'

The doorbell rang and yet another new face came in. Fouda thought it was one of Khalid's many messengers. Ever since he had arrived they had been coming and going, some bringing messages, some bringing food and all leaving with instructions. This time, however, it was one of al-Qaeda's cameramen. Abu Yousef, as Khalid called him, was holding a small plastic bag when Fouda shook his hand and took him to a corner in room two. He had a Sony mini DV Handycam, a cable-neck microphone and five 60-minute DV cassettes, but no tripod. 'Do not worry about that,' Khalid said as he indicated to Abu Yousef to go to room one. 'He will find a way round it.'

Now it was the turn of Khalid and Ramzi to interview Fouda about their interviews. They were always going to be in control of the situation, and Fouda knew that. But he also knew that when Abu Bakr had picked up the phone on behalf of al-Qaeda, both parties had entered an unwritten agreement. They knew very well the investigative nature of Fouda's programme, *Sirri Lilghaya*. They knew that it was all about facts, information and details. Fouda would have been prepared to put up with a week of rhetoric as long as he got out of there with a few minutes of facts and straight talking. And for that, he listened and listened.

From the beginning he had wondered whom he would be meeting. Bin



Laden, maybe? Or his deputy, the inscrutable Egyptian, Ayman al-Zawahiri? But they were figureheads, the public face of al-Qaeda, the spiritual leaders. Khalid and Ramzi were here to take credit for what they had *organised*. They were the two master planners of 11 September – relaxed, calm and willing to speak. The men behind the Twin Towers operation had decided to break their silence.

As they sat cross-legged on the floor in room five they swiftly began to explain the planning and execution of 'Holy Tuesday' – or the 'New York and Washington Raids', as they also call them, using the old Arabic word, *ghazwah*.

'About two and a half years prior to the holy raids on Washington and New York,' said Khalid, who was clearly taking the lead and speaking rapidly in his colloquial Gulf Arabic, 'the military committee held a meeting during which we decided to start planning for a martyrdom operation inside America.'

He continued: 'As we were discussing targets, we first thought of striking at a couple of nuclear facilities but decided against it for fear it would go out of control.'

Fouda was dumbfounded. Nuclear targets? Could he be more specific?

'You do not need to know more than that at this stage, and anyway it was eventually decided to leave out nuclear targets – for now.'

'What do you mean "for now"?'

'For now means for now,' Khalid said, silencing Fouda. He continued: 'The attacks were designed to cause as many deaths as possible and havoc and to be a big slap for America on American soil.'

'Who would carry this out?'

'We were never short of potential martyrs. Indeed, we have a department called the Department of Martyrs.'

'Is it still active?'

'Yes it is, and it always will be as long as we are in jihad against the infidels and the Zionists. We have scores of volunteers. Our problem at the time was to select suitable people who were familiar with the West,' said Khalid, his stern face inflexible as the details poured out.

Now it was Ramzi's turn to interrupt the story with another surprise. He had gone to room three and returned with a small, dirty grey suitcase. He caught Fouda's eye as he unzipped it. 'Yes, it is my Hamburg souvenirs,' he smiled, handing Fouda a cup of tea. 'You are the first outsider to have a look at this.' He carefully began to unload his 'souvenirs', one by one. Soon, strewn on the floor in front of Fouda, were the bulk of the planning materials used by Mohammed Atta and the other hijack pilots as they plotted their attacks.

This was extraordinary. Fouda had not doubted that Ramzi was involved in the cell in Hamburg and had played a major role in planning the attacks

in America. But here, now, in front of him, the very items used by Ramzi were being lifted nonchalantly out of the old suitcase.

There were dozens of items: a glossy Boeing brochure and flight manuals, a thick 'how-to-fly' textbook, an air navigation map of the American eastern seaboard, English language textbooks, floppy disks – lots of them, flight simulator CD-ROMs. It had all been in the Hamburg apartment that Ramzi shared with Atta, al-Shehhi, Bahaji and Essaber on the first floor of 54 Marienstrasse. And once the operation was in place and he had to leave, Ramzi had been confident enough to leave Germany with it all and travel to Pakistan, knowing that the contents of his suitcase would have created panic had a curious airport official chosen to open it.

'Wait, wait,' Fouda said as Ramzi tried to line up even more souvenirs. Next to a series of sophisticated illustrations on 'How to perform sudden manoeuvres', Fouda's eye had caught a page with paragraphs underlined and appended with handwritten notes. 'It is brother Abu 'Abdu'l Rahman's handwriting,' said Ramzi, referring to Atta by his al-Qaeda kunyah. It did not look much like the rather prettier handwriting in the chilling 'Manual for a Raid' document that had been found in the luggage Atta had left behind at Logan Airport and which up to this point had always been attributed to him.

The note in Atta's luggage read:

Force yourself to forget that thing which is called world. The time for amusement is gone and the time of truth is upon us. If Allah grants any one of you a slaughter, you should perform it as an offering on behalf of your father and mother, for they are owed by you. Do not disagree among yourselves, but listen and obey.

Ramzi explained the discrepancy in the handwriting. Atta was not the author of the instructions and prayers found in his luggage. They had been written by Abdul Aziz al-Omari, Atta's fellow hijacker and companion during the last hours of his life. Al-Omari, although one of the youngest of the hijackers, was recognised by the rest as having an exceptional knowledge of Islam – and a neat hand.

This discovery confirmed what Mohammed Atta senior had been saying since the emergence of this document. 'My son's is a funny handwriting,' he said, 'and I am announcing this for the first time. You could not tell if it belonged to a small kid or to a city planner.' When Fouda, however, challenged him to show the world some of his son's handwriting, he refused on the ground that 'the Americans would take it, scan it into a computer and programme it so as to compose whatever they like to attribute to my son'.<sup>17</sup>

Ramzi now spoke of how he had himself been eager to take part in the attacks. He had applied three times for a visa to enter America for flight training, but he had been turned down on security grounds.<sup>18</sup> He insisted,



and Fouda believed him, that he was desperately sad not to have taken a more direct part in the operation. 'We have to pay a tax to go to Paradise,' Ramzi had said at one point.

He revealed that his souvenir suitcase and its contents were mostly material brought by Atta from America for him to study and learn during the period when he was still expecting to be one of the 'martyrs'. He had learnt the annual flight schedules for American Airlines by heart and still had at his fingertips the minutiae of the esoteric symbols used in the schedules to explain flight variations. He explained that this knowledge had been used to plan the aircraft seizures.

On the floor of room five, where they all sat, talked, ate and slept, Fouda helped Ramzi spread out his souvenirs. He would later film them himself from every possible angle. He could hear Ramzi's voice every now and then suggesting something or another, but he went on and on, filming what amounted to 60 minutes of footage.

But first it was room one in which the interviews would be conducted. Abu Yousef, the cameraman, gave the impression that he knew what he was doing. Thanks to Sony, the mini DV camera can be operated by just about anyone. However, he showed great imagination in trying to solve the problems caused by the lack of a tripod. He simply placed his camera on the edge of a large, empty box. Fouda began to brief him on the style of the programme, but then thought again. 'Just fix your camera on a medium close-up shot,' he said, as Khalid roamed around looking up and down and in every direction before checking the image in the viewfinder again and again. 'Forget about over-the-shoulder shots. Just fix it and let it run.'

Fouda sat in front of the camera and invited Khalid to have a look into the viewfinder. 'What do you think?'

But Khalid was not yet comfortable. He yelled at Abu Anas, the visitor: 'Bring me that brown cloak, will you?' He then stretched it with the help of Ramzi, pinned it to the wall in front of the camera and had another look. Still, he was not comfortable. He disappeared for a moment and came back dressed in a large, loose brown cloak, almost identical to the other one, covering him from neck to toes. As everybody was laughing, he took it off, placed it on Ramzi's shoulders and asked him to sit in front of the camera so that he could have yet another look into the viewfinder. 'It is okay now,' he declared, having checked that it obscured his body shape and hid any particular characteristics. 'We can begin. Sit in front of me.'

When the camera was switched on, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed's appearance changed. He tried to look like a religious leader or the leader of a political party. But his shallow knowledge of both religion and politics caught up with him. He tried to sound authoritative, but he stumbled in his desperate attempts to compose a couple of decent sentences in classical

Arabic. And he tried to address an imaginary audience of Muslims like an old-fashioned orator, at the same time managing to confuse what Allah said with what the Prophet said.

On several occasions Fouda had to correct him and on others they both had to consult with Ramzi. By this time, whether it was due to the heat or embarrassment, Khalid was sweating profusely. Filming had to be interrupted several times so he could dry himself down. The whole experience appeared to have shrunk him, to have drawn his claws. Suddenly he was no longer aggressive.

During the 70-minute interview, Khalid referred to his boss, bin Laden, sometimes as 'Sheikh Abu Abdullah', sometimes 'Sheikh Osama' or simply 'the Sheikh', but always in the present tense, and always praying to Allah to protect him. Once, though, he made what Fouda thought was a 'slip of the tongue', referring to him in the past tense. How much we could, or should, make of this it is hard to say. One audiotape issued in November 2002 appeared to suggest that bin Laden had survived American bombing at Tora Bora in Afghanistan, as did two others that surfaced in February 2003.<sup>19</sup>

During this whole affair, Khalid projected himself as a man of action rather than a man of thought. If they had business cards, bin Laden would be the 'Chairman' of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri the 'Vice Chairman' and Khalid Shaikh Mohammed the 'CEO'. Ramzi would perhaps be the faithful employee who comes in first and leaves last – the sort of employee whose name would jump into his boss's mind in emergencies, one willing to help out with everything.

Ironically, al-Qaeda is a 'company' in more than one sense and, interestingly enough, this is how it had been referred to in al-Zawahiri's correspondence with some of his close followers. A letter found in his computer after the fall of the Taliban was designed to look innocent should it fall in the wrong hands. Dated 3 May 2001 and signed 'Dr Nour, Chairman of the Company', it said:

We have been trying to go back to our main, previous activity. The most important step was the opening of the school. We have made it possible for the teachers to find openings for profitable trade. As you know, the situation down in the village has become bad for the traders. Our relatives in the south have abandoned the market, and we are suffering from international monopoly companies. But Allah enlightened us with His mercy when the Omar Brothers Company was established. It has opened new markets for our traders and provided them with an opportunity to re-arrange their accounts. One benefit of trading here is the congregation in one place of all the traders who came over from everywhere and began working for this



company. Acquaintance and cooperation have grown, especially between us and Abdullah Contractors Company.<sup>20</sup>

Decrypt this message and it reads as follows:

We have been trying to go back to our military activities. The most important step was the declaration of unity with al-Qaeda. We have made it possible for the mujahideen to find an opening for martyrdom. As you know, the situation down in Egypt has become bad for the mujahideen: our members in Upper Egypt have abandoned military action, and we are suffering from international harassment . . . But Allah enlightened us with His mercy when Taliban came to power. It has opened doors of military action for our mujahideen and provided them with an opportunity to re-arrange their forces. One benefit of performing jihad here is the congregation in one place of all the mujahideen who came from everywhere and began working for the Islamic Jihad Organisation. Acquaintance and cooperation have grown, especially between us and al-Qaeda.<sup>21</sup>

Then there is the fact that al-Qaeda has always been engaged in commercial activity for one reason or another. Bin Laden himself built huge businesses in the Sudan in the early 1990s, winning large government road-building and construction contracts. In Afghanistan he had also helped to build bunkers in the mountains, while his many Arab followers often described themselves as employed in the honey business when entering or leaving Afghanistan. In East Africa, al-Qaeda had created very good business opportunities by cornering the market in tanzanite, a rare precious mineral used in the jewellery trade.

Now, in the opposite corner of room one, it was Ramzi's turn to speak. As he sat in front of the camera, the wall behind him was covered with a multi-coloured plastic rug. Unlike Khalid, he was not interested in covering his shoulders and hands with a cloak. 'It is better to be natural,' he said, 'and anyway we will keep the tapes for editing purposes before you have them in a few weeks.'

'A few weeks?'

'You see, brother Yosri, we have to introduce some alterations to our voices, cut out parts that are not appropriate and perhaps also blank out our faces.'

Fouda, anxious to obtain as much material as possible, suggested that this could all be done using Al-Jazeera's facilities in Qatar. But Khalid interrupted. 'You guys usually use the mosaic effect,' he said, referring to the technique often used in TV programmes to disguise someone's face. 'But this could be easily decoded,' he said firmly. Ramzi added: 'We have our own production

company, al-Sahab (The Clouds), and we can easily deal with that.' It was true. In fact, when Binalshibh was arrested in September 2002, investigators found hundreds of blank CD-ROMs in the apartment.

To make the point more clearly, Khalid went off to room three and came back with a small box. 'These are for you,' he said as he opened the box and started to hand Fouda some CD-ROMs and mini DV cassettes. 'This is brother Ibn al-Jarrah's<sup>22</sup> will in Arabic; this is the same in English for your friends in London; this is a documentary we made on the new crusades, which you guys did not broadcast;<sup>23</sup> and this is the beheading of Pearl the Zionist. You may use as much as you wish, and we would actually like you to distribute them to news agencies and Western TV channels, especially the French.'

As Abu Yousef lined up his shot with the video camera, Ramzi now sat on the floor in front of Fouda, calm, gathered and relaxed. 'So, brother Abu . . . ' Fouda did not finish his first question when Ramzi interrupted.

'Stop!' he ordered the cameraman, 'No kunyahs, please.' It did not, however, take him long to get in the mood. Now, he was different. The Ramzi who always needed a nudge or two could not stop talking.

'*Al-hamdu li'llah* [thank God] who said in His Glorious Book: "Fight them! Allah will chastise them at your hands, and He will lay them low and give you victory over them, and He will heal the breasts of folk who are believers",'<sup>24</sup> he started off. 'No sane Muslim should doubt the fact that [the day of] the Holy Tuesday operations in Washington and New York on 11 September was one of the great days of the Muslims. It brought back to them the memory of the days of the ghazwahs and battles of Badr, Hitteen, al-Qadisayyah, al-Yarmouk and 'Ain Jalout' – referring to great historical battles won by Islamic forces.'<sup>25</sup>

Ramzi continued on and on in beautiful Arabic, speaking in religious terms and phrases, before he began to answer Fouda's first question. 'As for the question of coordination,' he said of his own role as co-ordinator of 11 September, 'it is, in short, a process of linking the cells to one another, establishing a communication hub between these cells on the one hand and the General Command in Afghanistan on the other hand, and defining priorities of action for these cells. It also means following up on their work throughout the different phases, until the hour of execution. It is also about solving the problems that might face the brothers in these cells and devising an appropriate security umbrella under which the brothers can move around.'

For an 'Islamic activist' who lives in the West, how wide can this 'appropriate security umbrella' be? And how far, in their eyes, can a believer go in his efforts to deceive a non-believer?

Well, it would appear, as wide and far as necessary. Back in the Karachi hotel room, Abu Bakr had already said that it was acceptable for Fouda to miss the Friday prayers. A good Muslim should never lie, but Binalshibh lied



several times to the German authorities. Atta too lied several times. He lied to his professor in Hamburg when, in justifying his absence, he told him he had 'family problems'. He lied to his flight instructor in Florida when, in covering up their past, he told him he was al-Shehhi's uncle. And he lied to the whole world when, in laundering his identity, he changed basic details in his passport. Nor did the deceptions finish there.

Al-Qaeda's members, while preaching one morality for others, were as inconsistent as those about whom they preached. In the mountain of documents left behind in al-Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan, one Yemeni, Khalid, wrote to his brother describing the people he had just joined:

I am in a whirlpool of contradictions. You cannot trust anyone here. Imagine that I have to hide the copy of the Koran you gave me for fear it might get stolen like my watch. They train us here on how to mix with the Christians and how to emulate their life style. We have to learn how to drink alcohol and to shave off our beards.<sup>26</sup>

Like missing prayers, drinking alcohol is one of Islam's most hated *Kaba'ir* (major sins). But it seems that one of the most senior hijackers, the Lebanese Ziad al-Jarrah, was encouraged, or at least licensed, to do just that. He blended in nicely with Westerners, lived with a girlfriend, according to his family, went out to pubs and clubs, and drank alcohol up to the very last moment on his way to 'paradise'.

As his good friend and flight instructor in Florida, Arne Kruithof, confirmed, 'Ziad was just an all-round fun guy to be with, whether that was on the ground or in the air, or off-campus when we went out. We had barbecues, played volleyball on the beach, and he used to drink the occasional bottle of Bud.'<sup>27</sup>

Call them sins of omission, but by the ultra-high standards that al-Qaeda set itself, these were major sins, the small lies that covered up the big lie.

Ramzi began to explain in more detail the events in Germany. By the time he had set about laundering his own identity, the stage in the Hamburg theatre was all but set. Each 'brother' had already embarked on his role, reconnaissance units had been dispatched, and bin Laden had already sent very open and public messages to Washington. They all fell on deaf ears. 'They never understand,' bin Laden had said, with a shrug of the shoulders, in one interview, 'until they are hit on the head.'

## NOTES

1. The Islamic calendar follows from the year of the Hijrah, when the Prophet Mohammed had to flee from Mecca to Medina with his early followers. The first year corresponds with 622 in the Christian calendar.

2. *The Glorious Qur'an*, Surah 9, Verses 38–39.
3. *Ibid.*, Verse 111.
4. Also known as *Yathreb*.
5. The biggest tribe of Mecca, from which the Prophet Mohammed came.
6. *The Glorious Qur'an*, Surah 8, Verses 12–16.
7. *Ibid.*, Verses 65–67.
8. Early followers of the Prophet who fled Mecca with their new faith to Medina.
9. Inhabitants of Medina who welcomed the Prophet and his early followers and supported them.
10. Exclusive interview with Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammed, London, August 2002. His justification for this classification of the UK is that the British government is helping the Americans in their 'war on terror'.
11. They also call them 'the two ghazwahs of Washington and New York', and sometimes 'the Holy Tuesday operations'.
12. Hassan Mneimneh and Kanan Kakiya, 'Manual for a Raid', *New York Review of Books*, 17 January 2002.
13. See [www.fbi.gov/pressrel/pressrel01/letter.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/pressrel/pressrel01/letter.htm)
14. The authors believe that the letter (T) indicates the Arabic word for aeroplane, 'Ta'irah'.
15. An Arab, even before the birth of Islam, would usually have a given name followed by ancestry names. But he would also have a *laqab* which is normally a description of a physical feature, a behaviour, an attitude, the work that he does, an anecdotal situation that has stuck with him, etc. Many Arabs nowadays can find the roots of their family names/surnames in this *laqab*.  
He would also have a kunyah. It literally means 'hidden name' and is usually given as one progresses from boyhood to adulthood. It mostly starts with either Abu (father of) or Ibn (son of), followed by a given name different from his original one. From then on he would be called as such as a matter of respect. For example, a famous Arab poet from the Abbasyd age had the *laqab* Abu'l'Ataheyah, and the kunyah Abu Ishaq, but not many would know that his real name was Ismail Ibn al-Qasim Ibn Suwaid Ibn Kaysan.  
The contemporary meaning of kunyah is in a sense 'less hidden', though it slightly differs from one part of the Arab world to the other. In Egypt, for instance, it would be a straight 'Abu + eldest son's name', whereas in the Gulf countries it would be a straight 'Abu + father's name'. Some names in particular are always associated with specific kunyahs: a Mohammed would also usually be called Abu'l'Qasim, a Hassan Abu Ali, an Ibrahim Abu Khalil, a Mostafa Abu Darsh.
16. Referring to Jane Corbin's *Panorama* broadcast on BBC, December 2001.
17. Interview with Mohammed Atta senior, *op. cit.*
18. The security grounds were the suspicion of his involvement in the attack on the American destroyer USS *Cole* off the coast of Aden, Yemen, 12 February 2000.
19. Broadcast on Al-Jazeera Channel on 11 November 2002, the 145-second voice recording referred to recent events including the Bali bombing in Indonesia and

the theatre hostage crisis in Moscow, all of which took place after Fouda's interviews with Mohammed and Binalshibh. The Americans initially accepted the tape as genuine, but Swiss investigators later said they were 90 per cent certain it was faked. The authenticity of the two later tapes has not been challenged.

20. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, issue no. 8784, 16 December 2002, p. 3.
21. A similar type of coded talk was used around the same period between Atta and Binalshibh as they approached the zero hour of 11 September.
22. Kunyah for Ahmed al-Haznawi, one of the so-called 'foot soldiers' on board United Airlines Flight 93, which was piloted by the Lebanese Ziad al-Jarrah and crashed over Pennsylvania. Parts of his will had already been broadcast for the first time on Al-Jazeera Channel shortly before the meeting in Karachi.
23. Al-Jazeera did receive a copy of the documentary that was little more than a tribute to the 'martyrs' of the mujahideen during their struggle against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan and subsequent infighting. Al-Qaeda later sent a copy to the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), which, surprisingly, ran parts of it.
24. *The Glorious Qur'an*, Surah 9, Verse 14.
25. In Badr the Muslims defeated Qureysh of Mecca, in Hitteen the Crusaders, in al-Qadisyyah the Persians, in al-Yarmouk the Byzantines and in 'Ain Jalout the Mongols.
26. *Al-Majallah*, issue no. 1188, 23 November 2002, p. 24.
27. Exclusive interview with Arne Kruithof, Venice, Florida, August 2002.